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VII.—On the Single Case-Form in Italian.

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The question as to which of the old Latin cases was the prototype of the single forms which remain in the declension of the Romanic languages has been often discussed, but is still unsettled. Opinions have varied between the nominative, accusative, and ablative, or two or more of these together; and some scholars, in despair of tracing any single case, have concluded that the ground-form alone survived.

The various views may be conveniently ranged under three heads. According to the first, no particular Latin case has survived in the modern languages; but the simple ground-form remains, divested of the old case-endings, and clothed in such new guise as each particular language has chosen. According to the second view, we have in the modern nominal forms the remains of some specific Latin case, differing in the various countries; and this case or cases survive in virtue of something like conscious choice or of a logical necessity. Professor Diez has stated and defended this view;* concluding that the normal cases are, for the Provençal and old French, the nominative and accusative; for the modern French, Spanish, and Portuguese, the accusative; for the Italian, the accusative with a considerable influence of the nominative. According to the third view the modern case-form is the phonetic result of the wearing away of the old endings, in consequence of which the cases came to coincide in a single form; as the old Latin dative *dominōi* and the ablative *dominōd* were in time merged in the single form *dominō*. Professor d'Ovideo† compares the old forms to pieces of money in circulation for a long time, and becoming by abrasion undistinguishable; and remarks that although in all morphological transformations there must be a mental process, yet the wheels, so to speak, on which the mind moves, are the phonetic changes.

* Grammar, II³, p. 5, ff.

† *Sull'origine dell'unica forma flessionale del nome Italiano*, p. 12. (Pisa, 1872.)

Professor Ascoli* is very careful to exclude any idea of conscious choice or logical necessity; and the keynote of the theory is the explanation of the phenomena on the principle of phonetic decay.

It is often stated that in the transition from the Latin to the modern languages there has been a loss of cases; which of course is true of the flexional forms. But even M. Brachet† uses such language as this: "The tendency to simplify and reduce the number of cases was early noticed in the vulgar Latin; the cases expressed shades of thought too delicate and subtle for the coarse minds of the barbarians," etc. So M. de Jubainville‡ discovers a new principle of declension in the Merovingian times, consisting in this, "that in spite of the considerable number of forms" (he refers to the confusion of forms in the documents), "the number of functions which the mind conceives and requires to express in words is considerably reduced." But a moment's reflection ought to convince one that the logical relations still exist, and must find expression in any, even the simplest, language; it is only a question of *how* they shall be expressed. If for some reason the moderns no longer express these relations by the case-endings, they must do so in some other way; and they do so in fact by prepositions. Moreover, the barbarians were not so entirely unaccustomed to a nominal inflexion as to be quite overcome on meeting another; and the considerable preservation of the verbal inflexions with the creation of new synthetic forms in the modern languages shows that this at least is not the solution of the problem.

The facts are to a great extent conceded on all hands. At the end of the third century the final *m*, and at the beginning of the fourth, the final *s* were inaudible in the common pronunciation; for the *u* in final syllables of the classical language we find *o* in the earlier and vulgar Latin, which has remained in some of the dialects; and the endings *es* and *is* were to some extent interchangeable. Instead of the genitive and dative, the

* *Archivio Glottologico Italiano*, Vol. II., Part 3, pp. 417-421.

† *Grammaire Historique*, 10^{me} ed., pp. 52, 147.

‡ *La Déclinaison Latine en Gaule à l'Époque Mérovingienne*, p. 160.

popular language of all periods used more or less frequently the ablative and accusative with prepositions; and this increased with the loss of the case-endings. Which of the two was cause of the other it is not easy to say; but it seems more natural to suppose that the indistinctness of the mutilated forced a resort to the periphrastic forms.

Granting these differences between the written and spoken language, the vulgar Latin must at the end of the empire have presented in the singular of the first and second declensions, and in the parisyllables of the third, paradigms identical with the modern Italian; *rosa, domino, regno, pane*. The *u* stems of the fourth followed the analogy of the second; and the *e* stems of the fifth that of the first or third. In the stems in *ero* of the second which omit *us*, and in the *ri* stems of the third, the reduction would have left two forms, of which the oblique form has remained; there was, however, a wavering in the nominative forms in the original.

In the imparisyllables of the third with variable or invariable accent, the phonetic reduction would have left two forms in the singular, one from the nominative and one from the oblique cases; *sarto, sartore*; the nominative form has almost entirely disappeared, and the oblique form has inherited the succession, the exceptions being numerically of no importance.

The imparisyllabic neuters have occasioned the most discussion; here the nominative and the accusative, coinciding in a single form, had the weight of frequency in their favor, and have in Italian survived to a greater extent than the longer form. *Capo, volume, nome, fiume, seme, carme, germe, rame, legame, cece, lido, petto, pegno, tempo, sterco, ghiomo, lato* and others are nominative-accusative forms; *termine, fulmine, rovere, acero, cadavere, sovero-sughero, papavero, genere, rudere, ulcere, viscere, folgore*, are ablative forms; whereas in *vime-vimine, addome-addomine, pepe-pevere, marmo-marmore, solfo-solfore*, both forms have survived together. But the companion form may often be found in a dialect or cognate language when it has been lost in Italian; in Sardinia (Logudoro) we find *nomene, flumene, esaminu, ramine, legumene*, (Campidano) *nomini, semini*; so many of the longer forms in Spanish;

cadaver-cadavere in Sardinia, *folg* in Friuli, etc. Professor Ascoli,* from whom many of these examples are taken, has discussed this point in detail, giving many other forms in Rumanian, in the dialects of Friuli and the Grisons; and has refuted the argument drawn from this class of words in favor of the accusative theory.

The reasoning of Professor Diez, for instance, is this: Italian *amore* can only come from Latin *amorem*, *amore*; *domino* from *dominom*, *domino*; that is, accusative or ablative; but *corpo* must be not from *corpore*, but from *corpus* nominative-accusative; and the several types are reconciled by considering the accusative as the normal case. But if the various dialects taken together show in this class of nouns a fair proportion of both forms, there was plainly no logical necessity for the adoption of either particular case; the survival was the result of a more frequent use of one than the other in this or that particular region; perhaps in some instances a mere matter of chance.

For the plural, we have in the first declension *rose*, which is the old nominative, perhaps the phonetic successor of *rosis*; but *rosas* is lost. In the second declension we have *domini*, the old nominative, perhaps also the successor of *dominis*; but *dominos* is lost; and even the nominative of the neuters has only survived in a few instances, the analogy of the masculines being too strong. In the third *principi* is probably a new formation after the analogy of *domini*, although some take it as the reduction of *principis* for *principes*; at any rate *principibus* is lost. The feminines after much hesitation followed the same analogy; as also the neuters when they have not gone over to the second declension; but the old forms in *ora* were very tenacious, and even for a time drew over some of the neuters of the second.

The recent advocates of the purely phonetic theory write the paradigms of the vulgar Latin with the periphrastic genitive and dative. This of course simplifies the matter very much; a form like the genitive plural is very inconvenient. But granting that it very early fell into disuse, if we

* Ibid., p. 423.

are discussing the fate of the Latin cases, the disappearance of all the non-survivors must be explained.

The results of phonetic decay differ of course in the various countries according to the special aptitudes of the people. In France it would have left for the first declension one form in the singular, three in the plural; for the second, two in the singular, two in the plural; for the third masculine and feminine, two in the singular, and one or two in the plural; so that after slight losses and changes by way of analogy we should reach a system not far differing from that exhibited in the earliest texts; some outstanding forms still preserving their independence, like the accusative singular in *ain*, and the genitive plural in *or*.

The subsequent progress falls under our direct notice. An *s* is added to the nominative singular of the third declension after the analogy of the second, which was numerically the strongest, though the rule is not consistently observed in the texts; and gradually the *cas régime* comes to perform the additional function of the nominative, which as gradually drops out of sight; leaving still, as M. Meyer* observes, a declension of two forms, in that the two numbers are yet distinguished. If the process were to go on still further, this would also disappear; and even now it exists mostly only in the written language.

The history of the French declension throws light on that of the Italian, since the operating causes must have been in their nature the same. The moving spring in both cases is at first phonetic decay and change; when this has been at work for a time, there remains a mutilated declension of one, two, or three cases for each number, and only three of the five original schemes. It left in French a tolerably symmetrical system of declensions, owing to two peculiarities; first, the persistence of the final *s*, which saved the distinction of cases in the second; secondly, the general loss of the syllables after the tonic, which removed many differences, and left forms more nearly coinciding with the simple stem. On the other hand, in Italy, the native soil of the Latin, the paroxytones

* *Bibl. de l'École des Chartes*, V. V. 215.

were tolerated or even favored, and the old endings remained vigorous much longer and in greater variety. Then ensued a struggle for existence among these forms; and aside from the simple phonetic currents, a sort of sexual symbolism, as Professor Flechia* calls it, was the strongest influence in determining the three schemes as they at present exist. Thus some of the neuter plurals of the second and third went over to the first; as also feminines of other declensions; and the scheme *o*, plural *i*, rallied most of the masculines. In fact most of the changes from the old declensions occurred for this reason.

In the third singular there remain distinct traces of an intermediate declension of two cases, as in the French; and a list of these *doppioni* might be made from those given by d'Ovidio, Caneleo,† Flechia, and Ascoli. But in general one form has perished, chiefly the nominative; or if both have survived, they have become practically different words. Examples of the waverings and irregularities may be found in abundance in Nannucci;‡ it was after all the grammarians that settled the rules; and the irregularities which still remain may generally be explained by the persistence of some of the old forms.

If the facts have thus far been correctly stated and explained, it would seem that neither of the three theories is sufficiently broad to include them all.

The theory of the retention of the mere ground-form of the old substantives seems to explain nothing whatever. Of course the substantial part of the word was retained; if not, what could have been retained? But if we ask *how* it happened, we are forced to answer: By the falling away of the old endings. If then they so fell away as to leave for a time in common use the naked root, which was afterwards clothed with new endings, the theory certainly does explain the matter. But is there any evidence of this? Is it not rather true that certain of the old endings never fell out of use, a few new ones came up, and the others were lost?

* *Rivista di Filologia e d'Istruzione Classica*. Torino, Anno I., Fasc. 1, p. 91, etc.

† *Rivista di Filologia Romanza*, I. 132.

‡ *Teorica dei Nomi della Lingua Italiana*, passim. (Firenze, 1858.)

The theory of the accusative or any specific case does not meet the difficulties. It may be true that the form of this or that case substantially reappears in the new form; but not because it was the accusative. The question recurs again: How and why? And as Professor Schuchardt* says, the theory resembles that time-honored rule of the Latin grammar, which we have all in early years received with bewildered and unquestioning trust, that of the genitive singular of the first and second declensions, and the ablative, etc., in answer to the question "Where?"

There remains the phonetic theory, to call it thus briefly; and here we must call attention to the form of statement. Professors d'Ovidio and Ascoli state it broadly, that the modern form is the result of the gradual wearing away of the old endings, and the coincidence of the previously different forms. The former allows that the generalization of the accusative may have operated the transformation "in a small degree"; and the latter, when considering the Spanish and Sardinian plurals, adopts the principle of natural selection.

But the phenomena are of too complex a character to be brought under so simple a statement; phonetic decay explains the singular number very well, but it is quite insufficient for the plural. The statement should then be made broad enough to include all the facts. It seems more reasonable to enlarge it somewhat after this fashion:

The present case-form is the result of the phonetic decay of the old Latin forms; but whenever this alone would have left more than one form for a number, there was a sort of natural selection, resulting in the survival of that one which, from its phonetic character, best suited the habits of the people using it, or which, oftener recurring in ordinary language, impressed itself more distinctly on the mind: in masculines and feminines this was generally the continuation of one of the oblique cases, chiefly the accusative; in neuters, generally the continuation of the common form of nominative and accusative; and where the present form is a new one, it has been made after certain analogies already existing in the old language.

* *Kuhn's Zeitschrift*, Vol. 22, p. 180.